

WSDOT Aviation System Plan Working Group Meeting
Meeting Summary
July 13, 2004
Puget Sound Regional Council Offices

System Plan Working Group Members in Attendance:

Paul Bennett – Kittitas County/Bowers Field
Greg Cioc – Kitsap County Public Works
Ron Foraker – Washington Airport Managers Association
Bob Hart – Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council
Greg Hertel – Port of Friday Harbor
Chis Hysom – Senate Republican Caucus
Carol Key – Federal Aviation Administration
Steve Kiehl – Puget Sound Regional Council
Mark Kushner – Benton- Franklin Walla Walla
Mike Lopez – Washington State Department of Health
Doug Maples – City of Yakima
James Morasch – Washington Public Ports Association
Toni Long – Airlift Northwest
Nisha Hanchinamani – WSDOT Aviation
Stan Allison – WSDOT Aviation
Kirk Kleinholz – Washington Pilots Association
Dave Martineau – City of Colville
Jeff Wilkens – Wenatchee Valley Transportation Council
Bea Von Tobel – Orcas Island Airport
Kelly Simpson – Senate Highways and Transportation Committee
Page Scott –WSDOT
Jerry Richardson – Community Airports Association
John Shambaugh –WSDOT Aviation
John Sibold –WSDOT Aviation
Rita Brogan –PRR

Welcome

John Sibold, WSDOT Director of Aviation, welcomed Working Group members and outlined the meeting agenda, which included:

- Working Group Goals
- Operating Guidelines
- Key Issues
- Decision Process
- Classification System Options
- Next Steps

Working Group Goals

Mr. Sibold described the three main working group goals:

- Develop a classification methodology to identify priority investments in the state's aviation system.
- Develop functional evaluation criteria to meet state aviation system needs.
- Discuss the role of regional transportation planning organizations (RTPOs).

He explained that this process will help determine the state's aviation investment priorities, classify the state's wide range of airports, and encourage participation in aviation decision-making on a local level.

Operating Guidelines

Mr. Sibold explained that two meetings are currently planned for the Working Group (one today and another later in the summer). The meetings will result in a proposed classification system, which will then be forwarded to the Aviation Advisory Committee for their review. Mr. Sibold also encouraged working group members to talk their community about issues discussed at the meetings, and bring comments and suggestions back to the group. He stressed that every group member has an important role to play, and every comment will be respected and recorded.

Why Are We in This Situation?

Despite its impact on state and local economies, airports are often overlooked. Most local transportation plans leave out aviation altogether. Mr. Sibold addressed the problems produced by a neglected system including deteriorating infrastructure and encroachments. He said that as pavement conditions continue to deteriorate, the state needs a plan to determine where resources should be invested.

Why Are We Updating the System Plan?

Mr. Sibold explained that this process is intended to help the Legislature and Transportation Commission make informed decisions about where to invest resources into the state's aviation system. Additionally, WSDOT Aviation wants to ensure that aviation is included in the Washington Transportation Plan (WTP) and regional transportation plans for multi-modal investments.

Questions:

Q: *What is the magnitude of the needs in aviation?*

A: It costs over \$10 million a year to maintain our state general aviation airport pavement. State aviation fees generate about \$1 million a year for runway repairs. The FAA invests about \$6 million a year in half the airports leaving an enormous gap in funding.

Q: *Does a functional classification system currently exist?*

A: Yes, the FAA uses a classification system based on aircraft use and type. One of the things we want to determine during these meetings is whether to use that existing system, or customize a system for ourselves.

Q: *What is WSDOT Aviation's role in allocating funds based on the functional classification system? What is the RTPOs' role? Who will ensure that airports are taken care of when RTPOs have many other funding interests?*

A: WSDOT Aviation will still be responsible for funding the aviation system, and the classification system will help determine where the funding should go. This is important tool for reporting to the Legislature. RTPOs will tell WSDOT Aviation if and how airports are significant in their transportation plans.

Q: *Is there a relationship that aviation has with roads in terms of funding?*

A: Aviation is a dedicated fund, however, the system plan should address ground surface and multi-modal issues.

Q: *Will RTPOs fall into the role of handling aviation funds, as they do with road construction?*

A: RTPOs will provide guidance. Aviation funds will continue to be handled through WSDOT Aviation. The regional plans will help WSDOT Aviation decide where the funds should go.

Comments:

- The state should define “statewide significance” before giving this job to the RTPOs.
- The role of RTPOs and MPOs is not to handle the funding, but to include airports in their regional plan.
- Coordination needs to occur not only between the state and regions, but with the FAA as well.

State Statutory Authority

John Shambaugh explained that the state has existing RCWs that establish:

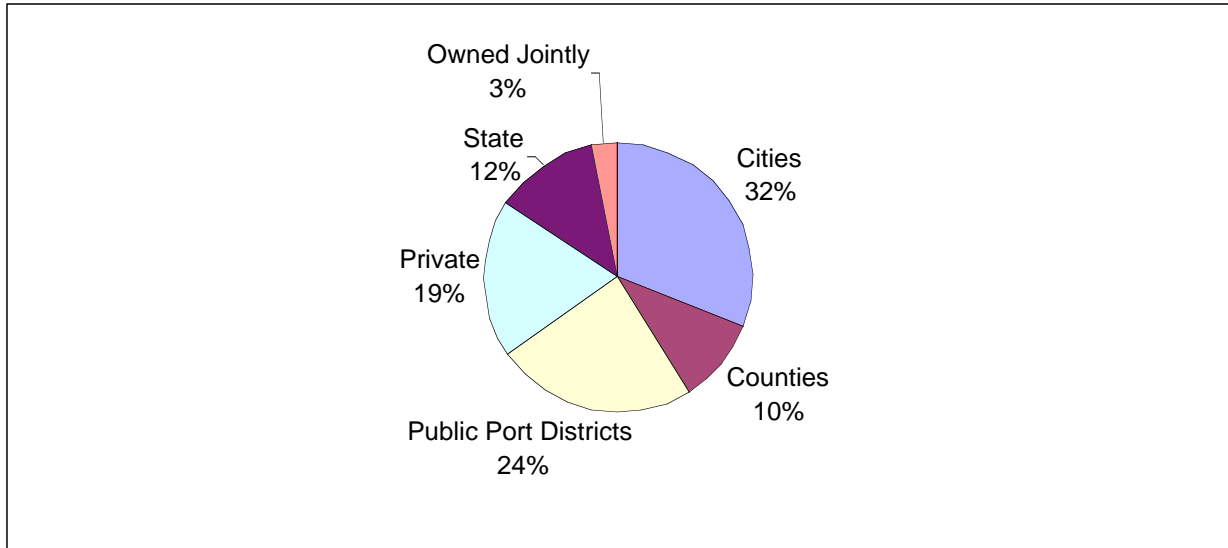
- Provisions for governing Aeronautics
- Regional transportation system planning process
- Statewide planning, including facilities of statewide significance
- Standards for state and local coordination for transportation planning

Aviation System Policy Goals

Goals that encompass the state's interest in aviation are: preservation, safety, capacity, and environmental protection.

Today's Aviation System

Meeting participants were given a state Aviation System Plan map. There are 129 airports in the System Plan. As shown in the following chart, most airports are owned by cities and public port districts:



National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems (NPIAS)

NPIAS airports are ones in the state that receive federal money, but must also comply with federal regulations and standards.

Mr. Shambaugh presented a map to group members showing the current airports in the state. The map illustrated that many airports are clustered together and may be duplicating services or not providing the right ones. Mr. Shambaugh asked the questions: Where should airports be located? Where are the gaps? Do these airports meet state needs?

Comments:

- Many people could look at this map and conclude that we have too many airports, but no pilot is going to agree with that. Aviation is not the same as surface transportation. When the surface transportation system deteriorates, it's still usable. When airports fall into disrepair – they close.
- Each airport serves a specific function and that's why classifying them is so important. We need to evaluate airports in a different way than we do highways.
- Airports that are not supported by local organizations will go away. We are trying to fund a system of airports that we truly need. The way to do that is to involve RTPOs.
- If we use the example of runway widths – one size does not fit all- we need to define what this is before identifying gaps. We need to define what are the minimum standards for each type of classification.
- The funding system is archaic. The pilot that's flying a Cessna is funding the system, while about 90% of other users are exempt.

Aviation Division Functions

WSDOT Aviation provides grants to airports across the state through the Local Airport Aid Grant Program. The division also registers airman and aircraft, operates air search and rescue, manages 16 airports, and provides guidance on aviation land use issues.

Question:

Q: *What is the role of the RTPOs? Championing the needs of airports or making the decisions?*

A: Decisions need to be made on a local level. RTPOs must be well informed about aviation issues to make decisions about airports that meet regional and state needs.

Draft Objectives: Aviation System Plan

Rita Brogan led a discussion about objectives for the Aviation System Plan. She presented the following draft objectives and asked for changes or additions to these objectives:

- Safeguard airports for future generations.
- Identify gaps and deficiencies in the aviation system.
- Integrate aviation with the state's transportation plan.
- Ensure accessibility for people/goods.
- Ensure airports are cost effective and developed in a fiscally responsive manner.
- Promote economic development.
- Support information needs for decision-makers.

Comments and Suggestions:

- Protect airports with compatible land use.
- Enhance tourism.
- Consistency with local comprehensive plans and vision statements.
- Recognize the need to take into account systems in adjoining states (PDX).
- Under "safeguards" recognize that airports are a non-renewable resource and are very difficult to replace.
- Recognize leverage potential for airports in the future.
- Recognize the need to balance local and state interest.
- Uses that apply to smaller airports still may have benefits that go beyond immediate geographic area.
- Decision makers need to better understand the importance of airports. Without this information, they are more likely to prioritize other modes.
- Add "emergency services" as an objective (security, disaster relief). It's particularly important where roads are not available.
- Maximize access to federal funds.

The Aviation Division will take these ideas into account in developing a revised list of objectives for the System Plan.

Other Considerations in Developing a Classification System:

Ms. Brogan asked if there were additional considerations that should be taken into account in developing the System Plan. Members of the group responded with the following suggestions:

- Prioritize whole group or exclude airports? It may not be necessary to exclude.
- Statewide significance may make less sense than prioritization. We need to maintain and then improve where there are needs.
- Need criteria because we don't have enough funds to meet all needs. Does it make sense to maintain airports that are close to the same community?
- Duplication can be addressed through criteria.
- Look at influences of other state system/airports.
- Take into account asset value to community and ensure that capabilities are not eliminated unless it is met through another facility.
- Preserve corridors to accommodate future growth.
- Look critically at capacity and unique functions of airports. Also consider back up requirements: runway, scheduled passenger service, emergency services, transportation alternatives, commercial business options, design standards, etc.
- Consider where impediments exist.
- Should we use NPIAS system to classify airports statewide?
- Should airports in the NPIAS be reclassified?
- NPIAS airports need to be publicly owned unless they are relievers.
- Need to acknowledge that not all NPIAS airports meet federal standards.
- Make sure to factor in unique features of Washington like water and mountainous locations.
- Role of airport in the community and for users outside of the community.
- Consider number of based aircraft.

Next Steps:

Before or during the next meeting, it was suggested that WSDOT provide the group with:

- Information on other states' methodology
- Fleet mix data
- More information about intermodal connections
- Characteristics of existing facilities, accessibility and runway type
- Vision of what an ideal aviation would look like
- Trauma designation information
- Criteria specific to agricultural areas
- Recommended structure
- Testimonials from other states with successful programs
- Regression analysis
- A model of a classified system based on information from other states.

It was also suggested that group members have the opportunity to review information and respond before the next meeting.

The next meeting will be rescheduled to occur sometime during the first two weeks of September. Nisha Hanchinamani will determine the availability of members and notify the group as soon as a date is selected.